Learn Tamil Alphabets – Part 1 (Vowels)

BY **SANJEEV NEWAR** - April 11, 2019

அ	ஆ	இ	ஈ	உ	ஊ
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū
எ	ஏ	ஐ	ஒ	ஓ	ஔ
e	ē	ai	o	ō	au
க	ங	ச	ஞ	ட	ண
ka	ṅa	ca	ña	ṭa	ṇa
த	ந	ப	ம	ய	ர
ta	na	pa	ma	ya	ra
ல	வ	ழ	ள	ற	ன
la	va	ẓa	ḷa	ṛa	ṉa
ஜ	ஸ	ஷ	ஹ	க்ஷ	ஸ்ரீ
ja	ṣa	śa	ha	kśa	sri

#Tamil script has attracted me for long. Both round & straight alphabets. And I could figure out some similarities with #Bangla script. However recently when there was trend to write names in Tamil, I thought why not push myself to learn the script once and for all? It took me a week to learn the script. Contrary to fear prevalent, I found the script easy to learn.

Maybe because I already knew Bangla and Devanagari. Though I still need practice to be fluent, but would love to share how I went about it. Note that I have not yet practiced writing. I have focused more on reading #Tamil. But once I can read comfortably, even writing should not be an issue. What made #Tamil script easy to master are:

1. Tamil has less alphabets than other Indian languages
2. My brain works in most stupid ways. And stupidity is easy to remember!

You see, stupidity is also an asset sometimes! So here I begin. You can invite other keen people to read this thread in sequence if they are interested.

They can follow my handle as now I plan to replicate it for all other scripts of Bharat. I will assume you know Devenagari. Even if you dont know, you can follow something similar in your own script to create your own learning style. Eventually I take advantage of the fact that all Indian scripts are mostly phonetic. The sequence of vowels and consonants are similar.

Like Devanagari, the alphabets of #Tamil are divided into Vowels and Consonants.

Good part – Most of these are similar to Devanagari. And some alphabets are not present in #Tamil

Bad part – Some alphabets are extra in Tamil.

But they are so different that they are easy. Learning Tamil is divided in 3 parts:

1. Learning vowels
2. Learning consonants
3. Learning consonant forms when vowels combine with consonants

In Devanagari analogy:
1. Learning अ आ
2. Learning क ख
3. Learning क का कि की

We start with vowels Tamil has following vowels, I also give example pronunciations:
அ a – Fun
ஆ aa – Father
இ i – Bit
ஈ ee – Sheet
உ u – Put
ஊ oo – Boot
எ e – Ben
ஏ ae – Mate
ஐ ai – Minor
ஒ o – Roti
ஓ O – Goat
ஔ – ou – Mouth

Now let us crack one by one.

Tip: Go slow. learn only one at a time. அ is almost like अ in Devanagari. Same vertical line and curves on left. This is only such letter in Tamil.

1. Vertical line denotes number 1. அ is for a. And a means One in English. Hence, moment you see the straight line, you know it is ‘a’.

2. ஆ is just a stretch of a அ अ to aa आ . Imagine a rope hanging down his tongue. When one starts saying ‘a’, you pull the rope and he shouts ‘aa’ instead. Exact shape of rope does not matter because no other letter is similar. Moment you see ஆ, you see அ ‘a’ plus a rope = ‘aa’.

3. இ is the most complicated and coiled letter in Tamil. Circle, circle, circle..like a snake twisted in many places. What happens if you suddenly see a cobra snake.

You shout ‘i’ इ in surprise! Also, even in Devanagari, इ has so many twists like cobra!

Hence இ = i or इ like in hit.

4. ஈ is very simple. You clearly see two ‘i’ connected. Each i represents i of bit. Two i means double the sound. Like in beat.

Hence, ஈ = ii = double the length of i. Simple. Right?

5. Next is உ. This is literally like writing 2 or two.
Two has ‘u’ in end.
Hence உ = ‘u’.

6. ஊ = உ + a heavy elephant standing over tail of உ.
Notice the trunk of elephant and two straight legs (side view).

So in pain, instead of ‘u’, the fellow shouted ‘u”u’. ऊ or oo.
Hence ஊ = oo or ऊ! Simple. And congrats. 50% vowels done!!

7. எ is similar as এ in Bangla. Same pronunciation.

Notice the vertical line. One vertical line. One means Ek in most Indian.

Hence, எ = 'e' as in Ek (one)

8. ஏ is just எ with an added wire to pull and elongate the 'e'. So it becomes 'e"e' – Double the 'e'. Devanagari doesn't have it.

So, ஏ = எ + எ = 'e' + 'e' = ए ए without break.

9. ஐ is like 2 eyes on top and 2 eyes in bottom. Eye Eye Eye Eye everywhere.

hence ஐ = pronunciation of Eye = ai. Like in Bhaiya, Maiya.
Maiya watches carefully over baby as if she has 4 eyes instead of 2.

Hence ஐ = ai of Maiya (ऐ)

10. ஒ looks like two eyes and a bent nose of Owl. Owl starts with O.

Hence ஒ = O (ओ)

11. ஓ is ஒ + extra loop at end of nose. Someone twisted nose of O so the pronunciation elongated O O. Hence
ஓ = ஒ + ஒ without break. Like in moan.

12. ஔ = ஒ + an elephant on it.

Remember that the elephant makes you shout u in pain in ஊ .
Hence, ஔ = ஒ + u = ou like in loud.

That's all. You master all vowels in a day!

13. There is one more symbol. Akh or ஃ. This is same as : is Devanagari to pronounce H or Visarg.

This is only symbol with dots. Hence easy to remember. Instead of 2 dots in Devanagari, you use 3 in Tamil. You have three because तमिल has three alphabets!

So we completed all vowels. Just review a few times. Then you will not even need to remember memory hacks.

Now we need to learn consonants.

After that consonant + vowel combos. And we are done!
Probably you can do faster than me!

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Learn Tamil Alphabets – Part 2 (Consonants)

BY **SANJEEV NEWAR** - April 18, 2019

அ a	ஆ ā	இ i	ஈ ī	உ u	ஊ ū
எ e	ஏ ē	ஐ ai	ஒ o	ஓ ō	ஔ au
க ka	ங ṅa	ச ca	ஞ ña	ட ṭa	ண ṇa
த ta	ந na	ப pa	ம ma	ய ya	ர ra
ல la	வ va	ழ ẓa	ள ḷa	ற ṛa	ன ṉa
ஜ ja	ஸ ṣa	ஷ śa	ஹ ha	க்ஷ kśa	ஸ்ரீ sri

Lets have some fun learning Tamil consonants. We learnt vowels in older thread. Like most Indian Bhasha, Tamil consonants are also categorized by pronunciation.

Eg, in Devanagari we have:
क ख ग घ ङ
च छ ज झ ञ
ट ठ ड ढ ण
त थ द ध न
प फ ब भ म
य र ल व

श ष स ह
क्ष त्र ज्

We need to know Tamil for each of these. Plus a few special alphabets. And we are done!

Let's start with first set:
Ka Kha Ga Gha
क ख ग घ
Ignore ङ् for now.

In Tamil, we don't have Kha and Gha.
And Ka and Ga have same letter க
So we just need to know one க for 4 alphabets!

க is easiest to remember, especially for Devanagari and Bangla people. Almost similar to क or क. Visualize a straight line coming down and then looping up to CUT itself and then coming back. All this travel to CUT itself. Hence க is Ka (Pronunciation of CU in CUT)

Next alphabet is ங which is same as ङ in Devanagari. Most people don't understand it, even among Hindi speakers. They just memorize it but few know how to use it. The real use is simple.

In Sanskrit, the sound N (na) takes form depending on what comes immediately after it. If any of
क ख ग घ comes then it is ङ
च छ ज झ then ञ
ट ठ ड ढ then ण
त थ द ध then न
प फ ब भ then म
Concept is to pronounce Na in a way that least movement of tongue is needed.

Hence the form of Na that is closest is given a separate alphabet.
For Ka group it is ங in #Tamil or ङ in Devanagari.
See, 3 lines and a Fat Nose (NaaK in Hindi) between two lines. Remove vowels and pronounce NK together. The kind of N you pronounce is ங.

Next is च छ ज झ Cha Chha Ja Jha
Tamil does not have Chha and Jha. And Cha and Ja are represented by same letter. Even Sa is included because Cha and Sa zones are close in palate. (Even in Asamiya I think it is

same).
The alphabet is ச which is க without tail.

The N sound for this is ஞ (Nja). Clearly you see a Nose on Left and a partial Circle around it. Circle starts with Sa. Circle is Geometric shape. Geomtery starts with Ja. Hence Sa, Ja, Cha have N sound of ஞ.

Next is easy. ट ठ ड ढ Tamil doesn't have Dha and Tha Ta and Da given by ட Looks like a broken T fallen on ground. Hence T (Tree), D (Doll) given by ட

he Na of ட series is given by ண.
It is a spriNg attached to T. In Bangla, Devanagari also Na is given by ন ন . The Na is elongated with more loops in Tamil and hence it becomes a deeper Na like in Danda, Bhandaar unlike in Bandar.
Congrats. You now know 50% #Tamil alphabets!

Now come त थ द ध न . (English cant differentiate त from ट). In #Tamil, there is no थ, ध. And for त, द same alphabet is used – த. That is why you will see #Tamil people using Th for T. This is to differentiate from T of Total.

த is easy to remember. Notice that this is alphabet க (Ka) stretched further like a tail. K is for KutTa (Dog). So த is Ta that completes the Kutta with its tail. Ta = Ku extending its tail to Ta for Kutta.
When you see க wagging its tail, you know it is த

ந has two parallel lines that show Nose. And curve is water flowing down the Nose. Hence ந is fully (dys)functional Nose or Na.

For प फ ब भ म Pa Pha Ba Bha Ma, again in #Tamil Pha and Bha dont' exist. And same alphabet is used for Pa and Ba – ப. This is just an open Packet or a Palang (Bed). Hence ப is P or B.

Ma is given by ம. You clearly see Me sleeping on My bed (ப) with my Maatha on side. Hence ம is Ma.

Next is Ya given by ய. You clearly see the letter starts with U. Hence ய is pronunciation of U or Ya.

Ra is given by ர . You can see two Rail lines. Hence Ra is ர

La is ல. This is like the musical notation. And in music, you sing La La La La.

Va is வ. It is La La (Music) ல suddenly stopped. Hence Music becomes tragic Love. La was already there. So the stop becomes V or வ.

Next is the most complex alphabet unique to #Tamil. It is ழ. See that it starts with ட(Ta) followed by ம (Ma) and then a waving tongue below it. This waving tongue gives it same pronunciation that is used to pronounce Ta + Mi + L or Tamil! Hence ழ is the L of Tami!

This L of Tamil is different from normal L of Love. You almost completely turn your tongue to make full circle before touching palate. Learn the pronunciation from a native speaker. But just by looking at ழ you know it is L of Tamil.

Next is another La, unique to Tamil and Vedic Sanskrit and Marathi. It is ळ or ள. Just see an elephant sideways. Two parallel lines are legs. And trunk is on Left. Hence it is L.

Next is another Ra pronounced as ற. I don't know its exact pronunciation as different people suggest different things. But You see an उ turned 90 degree. उ is for Om when we are straight. But when we are forced to bent our fingers, Uri happens. Hence ற is Ra in Tamil!

We complete the Dravidian Tamil with this. There are now some controversial symbols that I will discuss next. Controversial because atheist Dravidians dislike their presence in Tamil because they come from Sanskrit texts. Hence not liked by them.

Tamil has 5 alphabets that are allegedly Sanskrit though I doubt these claims. Let us learn these. They look complex but are easy to remember:
ஜ ஷ ஸ ஹ க்ஷ ஶ்ரீ

ஜ is for Ja. Notice how similar it is to Ai(eYe) or ஐ. Now Ya of Sanskrit often becomes Ja in local lingo. Yogi becomes Jogi. In Bangla, all Ya were pronounced Ja till recently. Hence, ஐ (eYe) when modified becomes Ja or ஜ.

ஷ is for Sha. The symbol itself looks like a Sheep with horns on right, and body on left.

ஸ is for Sa. You see an inverted s (Ƨ) lying down. Hence the pronunciation Sa. I also see Soond (Trunk) of elephant in the symbol.

ஹ is for Ha. I see an O on left and then an M to make it OM. Since Tamil culture are so friendly, they make you feel at Home by drawing a long line to Help you. Hence this means H.

க்ஷ = க(Ka) + ஷ (Sha) = Ksha क्ष . Easily visible in symbol itself.

Finally, grand symbol : ஸ்ரீ
Notice Tilak on top of symbol on left. You give Tilak to somone you respect. And call him Shree श्री। This symbol means Shree!!

So all consonants over. Next we will study consonant + vowel combos. And thats all. We can read oldest spoken language!

Yes, some of my memory tips may look crazy and illogical. But our goal is to learn the symbols in whatever way. Not give exam in logical reasoning! Just practice these symbols for a while. Revise for few days and soon you will remember without my stupid means!

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Learn Tamil Alphabets – Part 3 (Consonant + Vowel combos)

BY **SANJEEV NEWAR** - April 22, 2019

அ	ஆ	இ	ஈ	உ	ஊ
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū
எ	ஏ	ஐ	ஒ	ஓ	ஔ
e	ē	ai	o	ō	au
க	ங	ச	ஞ	ட	ண
ka	ṅa	ca	ña	ṭa	ṇa
த	ந	ப	ம	ய	ர
ta	na	pa	ma	ya	ra
ல	வ	ழ	ள	ற	ன
la	va	ẓa	ḷa	ṛa	ṉa
ஜ	ஸ	ஷ	ஹ	க்ஷ	ஸ்ரீ
ja	ṣa	śa	ha	kśa	sri

Now in this thread, will study Consonant + Vowel combos:
In Devanagari: क् क का कि की कु कू के कै को कौ etc

In Tamil, something similar but with some specialties.

To proceed, make sure you completed threads on Tamil vowels & consonants. At least keep them ready for reference.

First form is simple.
க் with a dot over க means no -A pronunciation at end. Like Halant in Devanagari often

shown by क् or half letter at start of क्या.

There is no Bindi/ Anusvaar in Tamil. The dot represents half-consonant (Halant). Even nasal tones are shown by half consonants of Na like ன் ண் ந் ஞ்.

So Bandar will be பந்தர்
ப – Ba ब
ந் – n (of த series)
த – da द
ர் – r र

Next is for A அ and Aa ஆ For A, you just write plain alphabet.

For Aa, க becomes கா Again easy to remember if you know Devanagari or Bangla. There you add one vertical line. Here we add a thick strong pillar because Tamil has a strong history of nurturing Sanskrit.

This is true for all consonants. To add Aa sound, add the thick pillar. I will use a book "Learn Tamil in 30 days' and some online sources for giving word examples now. Try what following are and what they mean:
பாழம்
கண்
நகரம்
பக்கம்
அம்மா
காகம்
மரணம்
பயம்
லாபம்

For i sound, in Hindi or Bangla we use कि or কি. The की or কী is used for longer ee.

In Tamil we use கி for SHORTER i sound (இ)

For longer, ee (ஈ) we use கீ (an 'e' on top of alphabet)

Lets see examples of i and ee after consonant:
கி கீ Ki Kee
ஙி ஙீ சி சீ Si See
ஞி ஞீ டி டீ Ti Tee

ணி ணீ Ni Nee
தி தீ Di Dee
பி பீ Pi Pee
மி மீ Mi Mee
யி யீ Yi Yee
ரி ரீ Ri Ree
லி லீ Li Lee
றி றீ Ri Ree
ஜி ஜீ Ji Jee
ஷி ஷீ Shi Shee
ளி ளீ Li Lee
ஹி ஹீ Hi Hee
க்ஷ க்ஷீ Kshi Kshee

Let us skip u and uu (कु कू) for now. Tamil literates will know why I am doing so. Now let us focus on adding following sounds to consonant (क क K க)

1. K + e = Ke = के = কে = கெ
Just add Buddha's ear before consonant. Similar to Bangla.

For a longer e sound (ஏ and not எ), K + 'e"e' = केए (without break) = கே Similar to கெ. Just that the Buddha's ear has now 2 ear-rings. One on top and one on bottom.

This works for ALL consonants in Tamil.

3. For ai sound (ஐ)
K + ai = कै = কৈ = கை
Just add a Spring before the consonant. Spring twists your tongue to make you say 'Ai O'.
Again works for all consonants

Nai = நை, னை, ணை etc
Pai = பை
Lai = ளை
Mai = மை
Rai = ரை
Vai = வை
Sai = சை

4. For o sound (ஒ) K + o = को = কো = கொ
Same as Devanagari or Bangla where ko means adding symbol for Ka and Ko together.

5. For longer 'o"o' sound (ஓ)
K + 'o"o' = कोओ (without break) = கோ Similar to கொ except that now we have Buddha's two ear-rings for longer 'o"o'

6. For ou sound (ஔ) – bound, round, sound K + ou = कौ = কৌ = கௌ This is again simple. You keep Buddha's simple ear on left and add ள on right.

Since ள is also used for 'La', it can be confusing at times. For example,
Kela = கே + ள = கௌ = Kou
But perhaps such situations are rare and mostly other la like ல or ழ is used.
So it doesn't cause much issue.

Now what remains are sounds of u and oo. For example Ku, Koo or कु, कू or কু, কূ

This has some complexities. Because form varies as per consonant. But there is a very simple hack.

The hack is that if you find any other symbol attached to a consonant apart from those we studied so far, it is either u or oo. And since both differ ONLY by length of pronunciation, in regular use it HARDLY matters! With this u can now read Tamil easily!

Don't worry, we will master u, oo also. But even if you cant, just start reading some texts and you will not find any problems if you just assume that the letter you can't decipher is either u or oo after a consonant.

I suggest doing some practice now before we cover u and oo.

If you follow my instructions in sequence right from vowels to consonants to consonant+vowel combo, in within a week you are sure to master #Tamil script. Just keep reading once in a while and you will acquire a lifetime skill!

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